

Rock climber struck by lightning

**September 7, 1981
Tahquitz Rock
1981-027**

By Walt Walker

It was 1530 hours Monday afternoon when the Hemet Station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department called me and requested RMRU's assistance. It had been reported to the U.S. Forest Service that a climber had been struck by lightning while climbing Tahquitz Rock. It was also reported that he was unconscious.

With a report like that I requested the S.O. to call Don Landells and have him meet us in Idyllwild with one of his jet Ranger helicopters. In record time, I had rushed home, changed clothes, loaded my gear and headed over to pick up the No. 1 van.

As I was driving towards Idyllwild I could see the lightning burst out of the dark clouds. It sent chills down my back as I remembered when two fellow RMRU members and I had been climbing North Palisade in the High Sierra, when we were caught on an exposed ridge during a lightning storm that was filled with bolts that struck all around us.



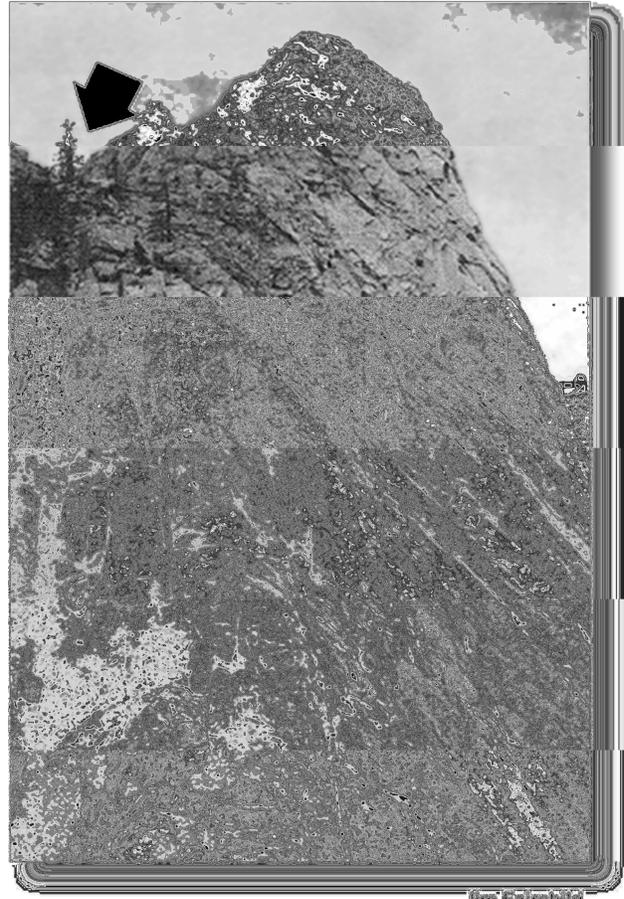
Jim Fairchild

LOADING UP - RMRU member Walt Walker (center) checks out the load chart with Don Landells (seated), as Idyllwild paramedic Larry Kent and John Dew look on.

Mary Bowman and I set up base near the Camp Maranatha softball field as members were arriving. Don Landells radioed that he was only five minutes out. Jim Fairchild and I quickly moved over to the field. When Don landed I filled him in on the details as RMRU members removed the rear doors of the bird. Jim and I climbed in the back, buckled up, and off we went towards the rock.

We flew directly to the area, near the summit of Tahquitz Rock, where the injured climber had been reported to be at. We circled the area a number of times then we circled the entire rock and searched the trail back to Humber Park. Don flew back to the field and we put the informant into the front seat and we took off again. The informant, Mike Draper, directed us to the area we had first searched. We radioed back to base and requested to have the S.O. contact all the nearby hospitals. Don headed back to the field and landed.

In about 20 minutes we received word that Samuel Roberts, Jr. was in the emergency room at the Hemet Valley Hospital. We later learned Mr. Roberts had been sitting on the rock when the lightning struck. He had received a ground current shock and was rendered unconscious. When he regained consciousness, other climbers had helped him off the rock and his climbing partners had drove him to the hospital. He was not seriously injured and was released that evening from the hospital.



Jim Fairchild

LILY ROCK - More often, now called Tahquitz Rock, as seen from the helicopter. The arrow points to the approximate location where the stricken climber was reported to have been. The area is at the top of the north-east wall.

RMRU is a volunteer search and rescue team that covers Riverside County and assists other teams with search and rescue efforts in other counties. Each member purchases their own equipment and takes time off work, without compensation, to participate in search and rescue missions. Team equipment is purchased from contributions from the community. We are a non-profit organization and are funded by [donations](#) from people like you.